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Far East District Employee shares home with Korean student

Seoul — The U.S. Forces Korea Good Neighbor Program English Camp was held May 15-21. During the week, 66 Korean students had an opportunity to live and go to school with U.S. families.

“The USFK Good Neighbor Program English Camp at U.S. Army Garrison Yongsan is the command’s top youth outreach program, which impacts the lives of Korea’s future leaders,” said Gen. Walter L. Sharp, USFK Commander. “This youth outreach program is designed to positively impact those future leaders by introducing them to USFK and its mission and role through organized, interactive, and educational activities.”

Brenda Dunwoody, Legal Technician at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Far East District Office of Counsel, hosted one of the students.

Tak, Hyo-jun, an 18-year-old high school student from Busan, had never experienced American culture before. So, on his first night with the Dunwoody family Tak was offered a meal that is not very common in Korea.

“We wanted him to have a purely American meal so we made Sloppy Joes,” said Dunwoody.

Dunwoody looks back on that night with laughter and fond memories as Tak thought that she was trying to make hamburgers and had somehow ruined them. At first he was not sure what he was eating, but after one bite he was hooked.

“He liked them so much that he ate four of them. Then he ate the left over sauce from the pan,” said Dunwoody.

Successful introductions to USFK families like this are what the camp is all about. It also helps students improve their English skills through total emersion. Although English as a subject is taught at just about every Korean school, very few students ever get the opportunity to use it in a realistic setting.

Dunwoody’s son, Connor, took Tak to the movies with their friends. Although many American movies are available in Korea, at the theater on USAG Yongsan there are no Korean subtitles.

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Tak can speak English but no more than a few sentences at a time. However, it did not take long for Connor and Tak to overcome the language difference and become friends.

“Kids are kids no matter what language they speak or what country they live in,” said Dunwoody. “They somehow learn to communicate and find a common ground, something I think adults could learn from them.”

During the day the students’ activities consisted of attending class at Seoul American High School, field trips to the DMZ and ROKS Cheonan, and tours of U.S. installations where they interacted with U.S. service members. There was also a sports day and picnic with their host families and a graduation ceremony at the end of the week.

At night, Dunwoody offered Tak ways to unwind from this busy schedule but to continue to learn about American family life.

“We spent time introducing him to American board games, video games, and movies,” said Dunwoody.

On Tak’s last night before his departure the Dunwoody family had a pizza party and video game night.

“Several of the other host teenagers and their Korean exchange students came to participate in the fun,” said Dunwoody. “They played Rock Band, laughed, ate pizza, drank soda, and shared common teenage laughter at it all.”

Tak had a great week during the English camp and in the end he invited his new friends to Busan to spend time with his family.

“Both boys found out that although they are from different cultures that they are not all that different from each other,” said Dunwoody.

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PHOTO:



Tak, Hyo-jun (right), an 18-year-old high school student from Busan plays ping pong with his friends during an event at U.S. Army garrison Yongsan. Tak spent a week with Brenda Dunwoody, Legal Technician at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Far East District Office of Counsel, and her family during the U.S. Forces Korea Good Neighbor Program English Camp May 15-21. (Photo by Patrick Bray)

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